

that issue. What we simply do is allow those law-abiding citizens who have concealed carry permits in their home States and choose to defend themselves when they travel around the country to do that.

Florida is a case in point. Florida is a big State that has had concealed carry permits for over 20 years and has agreements with multiple States. There is no evidence whatsoever in the State of Florida that there has been any suggestion of increasing crime.

Rather, I suggest the opposite would be true. I say to my colleague from New York that if someone who has a concealed carry permit travels to the State of New York, and I will say anybody who has a concealed carry permit from the State of South Dakota goes to New York and is in Central Park, Central Park would be a much safer place.

I yield 10 minutes to the Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. SCHUMER. Will my colleague yield for a question?

Mr. THUNE. I yielded time to the Senator from South Carolina. I will be happy to yield for a question later on the time of the Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be given 30 seconds to ask the Senator a question.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. THUNE. I object, Mr. President. The Senator from South Carolina has been yielded time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I always thought this debate kind of went down the side of liberal versus conservative until I got to understand during the confirmation hearings of Judge Sotomayor that Senator FEINGOLD is probably one of the strongest gun guys in the Senate. So I have had to recalibrate where I stand on this issue in terms of trying to pigeonhole people.

The point of the amendment, No. 1, is it should not be on the Defense bill. I think we all agree with that. We are talking about a Defense authorization bill to protect our troops and provide them the equipment they need and give them a pay raise. Now we are talking about guns and hate crimes. I don't know how we got here as a body, but we are here.

If you had to pick a nongermane amendment to talk about that makes some sense, that most Americans, I think, would like us to be talking about, it would be something fundamental to our country. I think most Americans are a little bit right to center on an issue such as this, for lack of a better phraseology. Most Americans believe in lawful and responsible gun ownership. Quite frankly, that is what this is trying to bolster.

I make an observation that if you take the time to get a concealed carry permit in South Carolina or any other State that allows it, you let the law

enforcement authorities know you are interested in owning a gun, you go to a training seminar that most States have to be able to get the permit or you have to go through whatever hoops the State set up to be able to carry a weapon in a concealed fashion, that you are probably not high on the list of people who want to use a gun to commit a crime. You would be incredibly stupid. You are pointing out to the whole State: Hey, I have a gun. I argue that the people who go through the exercise of getting a concealed carry permit are the ones you probably want to have a gun because they seem to understand the responsibility that goes with owning it.

The idea of does this make us less safe by allowing reciprocity nationwide makes no sense to me. I think of all the people we need to worry about committing gun crimes and violence unlawfully, the people with concealed carry permits are probably last on the list.

Americans do object to guns being used in the commission of crimes, and a lot of States have enhanced punishment whereby if you use a firearm in the commission of a crime your incarceration time can go up. In other words, we want to deter people from using a gun in the commission of a crime, and I think most Americans agree with those laws. I think the city of Richmond was one of the first cities in the Nation to have enhanced punishment for the use of a weapon. It is true that some people do misuse a weapon. Some people misuse a car. But it is a fundamental right under our Constitution, according to our Supreme Court, to possess a gun.

This amendment makes sense at every level. If I go through the process of getting a concealed carry permit in South Carolina and I go to another State that has a similar law, I automatically get the benefit of that law—no more than that law. So I don't know what the law is about carrying a gun in Central Park in New York. I know this: If you have a permit to carry a gun in South Dakota or South Carolina and you go to New York, you don't have any greater rights than the people in New York. And I also understand that whatever Federal restrictions on gun ownership that exist are not changed by this.

So this is pretty common sense to me. If someone goes through the process of getting a permit to carry a weapon in their own State and they choose to go to another State, they automatically get the benefit of that State's law when it comes to concealed carry. They do not get any more, they do not get any less, and it may be less than I would have in South Carolina. But because we are a group of people who travel around and visit among ourselves, this Federal legislation allows us to go from one State to the next and get the benefit of any law that may exist when it comes to concealed carry. But the precondition is that you would

have to have that permit in your own State and you have to go through the rigors of getting that permit in your own State.

To anybody who says this makes America less safe or more dangerous, again, that just makes no sense to me. Whatever gun crimes are being committed out there, they are not being committed, as an overwhelming general rule, by the people who have gone through the process of getting a permit and who carry a weapon. So, to me, it makes sense.

I congratulate my friend from South Dakota and tell him he has done something I think most Americans would agree with. He has allowed the American public to be able to travel and get the benefit of whatever law exists in a State when it comes to carrying a weapon—no more, no less. And this argument that people are somehow going to start carrying a weapon across the border makes no sense because whatever Federal restrictions there are on arms trafficking still stand.

At the end of the day, this legislation will help people who follow the law and obey gun laws to travel throughout the country without tripping themselves up and getting in trouble when they do not mean to get in trouble. If we didn't have this law, it really would be a mess. What we are trying to do is provide some clarity to gun ownership in America. We are not enhancing the ability to commit a crime. Quite frankly, I think it is the other way around; if everybody had the same attitude about gun ownership as people who get a permit, the country would be okay.

We are not changing any law that regulates trafficking of firearms. We are not allowing criminals to get access to guns. We are simply allowing people who go through the process of getting a permit in their own State to travel to any State in the Union which has a similar law and to get the benefit of that law. That will make life better for them, it will make life better in terms of legal compliance, and I think it is a proper role for the Federal Government to play.

This amendment enhances our second amendment rights. It doesn't change them in a way that makes America less safe. It allows people who are going to do the right thing to be able to do the right thing with some knowledge as to what the right thing is.

So Senator THUNE has done the country a great service, and I think we will have a big vote—I hope we will—across party lines. You don't have to agree with my right to carry a weapon lawfully. You may not choose that same right for yourself. But that is kind of what makes the country great—the ability for one citizen to understand that even though I wouldn't make that choice, as long as you make a choice responsibly, I am going to allow you to do that. That is what makes this a very special place.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.